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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 TEL AVIV 005903

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 09/21/2015

TAGS: [PREL IS MO SENV TS LE BU MU RS ISRAELI PALESTINIAN AFFAIRS GOI EXTERNAL](#)

SUBJECT: NEA DAS DIBBLE'S 9/21 MEETING WITH MFA MIDDLE EAST

DEPUTY DIRECTOR FOCUSES ON ISRAELI-ARAB RELATIONS

REF: MOSCOW 11184

Classified By: POLITICAL COUNSELOR NORMAN OLSEN, FOR REASONS 1.4(B AND D).

SUMMARY

1. (C) Israeli MFA Deputy Director General for Middle East Affairs Jacob Keidar told Deputy Assistant Secretary Elizabeth Dibble September 21 that the GOI hopes,

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in the aftermath of disengagement from the Gaza Strip, to improve its relations with Arab states in the Gulf and North Africa. He asked for USG assistance in this endeavor. DAS Dibble and Keidar agreed that it is impossible at this point to have talks with Lebanon on water issues because the new Lebanese water minister is a member of Hizballah. Keidar said Israel seeks to expand its existing trade relations with Bahrain, Oman, and Qatar, and to re-establish trade and diplomatic ties with Morocco, Tunisia, and Mauritania, all of which have recently made conciliatory gestures. None of these Arab states, however, has expressed a clear commitment to improving relations. Keidar and DAS Dibble agreed that restarting informal multilateral talks on a technical level might create positive momentum. END SUMMARY.

New Water Minister in Lebanon, from Hizballah

2. (C) DAS Dibble and accompanying officers met with Keidar, Oded Ben-Haim, director of the Palestinian Affairs Department, and Amir Weissbrod, from the MFA's Middle East and Peace Process Division, to discuss the Hasbani/Wazzani issue between Lebanon and Israel and recommencing multilateral talks between Israel and Arab states. DAS Dibble said that the USG cannot speak with the new minister of water in Lebanon, as he is a member of Hizballah. Israeli MFA Deputy Director General (Middle East) Jacob Keidar said he welcomes water studies and aid, but expressed understanding, and added, "We cannot do much with this minister, either."

Relations with Arab States in the Gulf and North Africa

3. (C) Keidar said the GOI seeks to normalize relations with its Arab neighbors, specifically to expand trade and political dialogue, and asked for USG assistance to do so. "It is the right time to move in this direction, after disengagement," he said. At present, Keidar said, only Bahrain and Oman trade directly with Israel. The FTA process with Bahrain, Keidar explained, is moving along. Amir Weissbrod said that both Oman and Bahrain have publicly announced the end of their primary boycotts of trade with Israel. An Israeli trade mission operates in Qatar, Keidar said, but it is isolated and does not have diplomatic status.

4. (C) The GOI has not been invited to return to Tunis, Keidar said, although the foreign ministers of Israel and Tunisia met at the UN, and will meet again at the World Summit on the Information Society in November. He also said that the Mauritanian foreign minister met with Israeli FM Silvan Shalom at the UN. Weissbrod noted that Morocco, among all of the North African states, has communicated the greatest willingness to resume formal ties, and may send a government minister to Israel in November, to attend events marking the tenth anniversary of the Rabin assassination. Keidar said, however, that none of the Arab leaders have communicated anything concrete about improving ties with Israel in response to Israeli overtures.

"Re-invent the Multilaterals"

5. (C) Keidar said that in order to improve Israel's relations with Arab states, the GOI would like to "re-invent the multilaterals" with a more informal and

flexible approach. Technical meetings, he said, could focus on issues such as science and technology, disaster management, disease prevention, and small businesses. DAS Dibble responded that this practical approach, which offers hope of measurable benefits, might provide a means to "jumpstart" the multilateral process, especially if it encourages contact at the working level. Arab leaders, she explained, could then claim to have gained something tangible from technical meetings. Keidar agreed, stressing the GOI's intention to view the process this time through "Arab eyes."

16. (C) Keidar then said that the Israelis still have questions about the Russian-proposed "experts" conference (reftel) tentatively scheduled for November in Moscow. The GOI, Keidar explained, is concerned that the purpose of the conference remains vague. DAS Dibble agreed, and stressed that the USG and the Quartet are focused on the Wolfensohn and Ward missions.

17. (U) This cable has been cleared by NEA DAS Elizabeth Dibble.

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